

Advisory Statement



Opening up the Lower Lakes to seawater

Many communities, particularly in northern New South Wales, are currently under significant pressure and are struggling due to severe drought. South Australians sympathise with these communities – we understand because we were also in that position during the Millennium Drought.

While the concept of letting seawater into the Lower Lakes has been raised from time to time, it is important to note that there would be no water savings from opening up the Lower Lakes to seawater. The South Australian Government exhaustively explored this option during the Millennium Drought when falling lake levels and exposure of acid sulfate soils threatened the environment and water supplies.

Opening up the barrages would require construction of a permanent weir at Wellington to protect communities that access fresh water upstream, with significant construction and on-going maintenance costs. Even if it was technically possible to construct the weir in the first place (there is some doubt that it is actually possible) South Australia would still need all of its Entitlement to enable the required volume to be passed over the weir to avoid major water quality issues in the newly created weir pool. Hence no water savings would be achieved.

While the lack of water savings discounts the legitimacy of any proposal to open up the barrages, it should also be acknowledged that opening up the barrages to allow seawater into the Lower Lakes would destroy the ecological character of a wetland of international importance. The action of opening the barrages would be a breach of Australian law.